

different by EmeraldTulip

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Summary:

There's a lot that El doesn't understand.

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Author's Note:

I decided to start posting the short fics on my tumblr in a little series over here, so I wanted this to be the first one! not much to say about it other than that I hope you enjoy!

There's a lot that El doesn't understand.

She doesn't understand why snow is so soft but ice is so hard, if they're really the same thing. She doesn't understand Jonathan's love of cameras, the way one hangs around his neck and he always seems to be peering through it as if it will reveal to him the secrets of reality. She doesn't understand Mike's moodiness, the way his emotions can go from high to low, happy to sad, so quickly and so frequently. She doesn't understand why Dustin's teeth were gapped but aren't anymore. She doesn't understand outer space, nor Will's fascination with it—and she certainly doesn't understand the reverence in his eyes as he gazes up, pinpricks of light reflecting in his irises. And she especially doesn't understand why—

The doors to the mall swing open as they all walk inside and head for the stairs, and in the corner of her eye El sees movement.

"Why do you do that?" she asks abruptly, interrupting their chattering, and Lucas almost trips on a step.

"What?" he replies, regaining his footing. They all continue to clamber up, but she feels their attention on her.

"You hold Max's hand," she says, struggling to translate thoughts into words.

Max frowns, one eyebrow lifting. "Yes, sometimes he does."

"But why do you let go when we walk in here?"

It's Will's turn to stumble, almost toppling into Mike even as Mike manages to catch him before he falls and Dustin pulls him back

upright. “She doesn’t get it,” he observes. “Of course she doesn’t get it.” He considered her for a moment, and his green-brown eyes make her feel, for a moment, like he is the only person who sees right through her. “Come on,” he says. “Let’s grab a table at Scoops.” The way he says it doesn’t make it sound like it’s over.

Sure enough, as soon as they walk in the door, she, Max, and Lucas are being shooed over to a corner booth.

“I know your order, don’t worry,” Will assures her, and El hears Dustin telling Lucas and Max the same thing.

So she makes her way to the table and sits, Lucas and Max sitting across from her.

“So,” Lucas says awkwardly. “You, um. You were asking something?”

“Yes,” she says, because she thought that was obvious. “Why do you not hold her hand inside?”

Max sighs. “It’s... it’s not safe here, El. It’s hard to explain because there’s not a good reason. It’s just... people don’t like it.”

“Don’t like what?”

Lucas discreetly glances around the shop before he takes Max’s hand, letting their intertwined fingers rest on the tabletop. “Some people don’t think that this is right. That it’s ugly.” There’s something akin to resignation in his voice—but not quite. Maybe just angry. “El... do you see a difference between me and Max? Or me and you, or me and any of our friends?”

She just looks confusedly at him for a moment before he pointedly gestures to his and Max’s interlocked fingers. What words does she know that can describe other people? She remembers Becky’s voice asking *what does she look like*, and remembers her own response of *different*. “You look different?” she suggests rather than responds, because honestly, she’s lost.

But Max nods. “Bad people—like Billy, for instance—hate people who look like Lucas,” she says bitterly. “And they think that I’m not supposed to like him.”

“Because you look different?” El tries to clarify.

“Yeah,” Lucas shrugs, fake casual. “Because a lot of people who look like you don’t like people who look like me.”

“Well, *I* like you,” El says firmly, because she *does*. She really does.

Max laughs, blue eyes squinting and her nose scrunching up as she does so, and El thinks that her laugh is pretty. “That’s good. I like him, too.” She squeezes their linked hands, her fingers drawing lines on her boyfriend’s palm, and if there’s one thing that El does understand, it’s that she knows they’re beautiful.

Author's Note:

comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated.

find me on tumblr, my main is [@fivehargreeves](#) and my writing blog is [@lowriting](#)!